Colleagues:

In 2004, the Princeton University faculty adopted new institutional grading expectations to address locally the national problem of grade inflation. This policy applies common standards to all academic departments and programs: A-range grades (A+, A, A-) shall comprise no more than 35 percent of grades earned in undergraduate courses and no more than 55 percent of grades for junior and senior independent work. My purpose in writing to you now is to enable you to better evaluate our students’ credentials by placing their academic records in context.

This grading policy reflects the commitment of the Princeton faculty to hold students to the highest academic standards by making careful distinctions in assessing the quality of their work. A-range grades at Princeton signify a caliber of academic achievement that deserves special recognition. By evaluating student work according to these rigorous standards, the faculty has restored substantive educational meaning to the letter grades earned at Princeton.

Commentators in the public press have singled Princeton out for taking effective leadership in combating pervasive grade inflation. Meanwhile, our closest peer institutions report that grades continue to rise, with A’s representing well over 50 percent of grades awarded for undergraduate work. Uncontrolled grade inflation devalues student achievement and undermines the reliability of grade point averages as a standard comparative metric. At its worst, it may discourage students from doing their best possible work.

The grading policy at Princeton is different. When you are evaluating the credentials of our students, I encourage you to consider their full profile of accomplishments. To the extent that you consider GPA in your deliberations, please note that Princeton grades stand out against a national backdrop of grade inflation. For more detailed information about our unique grading policy, please consult our website at http://www.princeton.edu/odoc/faculty/grading/.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at the above address or by e-mail at vasmith@princeton.edu. Thank you.

Valerie Smith
Dean of the College